

Redefining Value for Today's **Exhibitors & Sponsors**

Volume 3 – Engagement Strategy & Expectations
April 2021



Slingshot Into the New Era of Engagement

There's no denying the disruption caused by COVID-19 has forever changed the tradeshow and event industry.

Although the abrupt pivot in 2020 to virtual events worked reasonably well for attendees who still received their required education and the intrinsic connection to their professional community, exhibitors fared far worse. The systemic challenges faced in live events (unreliable access to audience, the cost vs. return ratio, lack of connection to conference programming) were only exacerbated in virtual experiences.



73% of exhibitors ranked virtual events as somewhat to extremely ineffective

The industry disruption in 2020 is giving exhibiting companies the freedom to think differently about how tradeshows and conferences meet their marketing and sales objectives.

Does that mean shows are at risk?

Not necessarily. It means there's enormous opportunity to build new experiences – both in the exhibit hall and via digital resources – to actively collect, organize and distribute intuitive information that better connects buyers and sellers. Event brands that strengthen their value and deliver memorable experiences and quality access to the right audience will continue to satisfy each group of stakeholders.

Digital tools are here to stay.

The challenge now is to integrate digital opportunities that complement the value proposition of live events into the year-round objectives of show producers, their exhibitors and their attendees. Exhibitors expect detailed metrics and audience analysis from digital events to help justify their commitment to the exhibit hall and their sponsorship investment.

Build a strategic marketing partnership.

Acknowledge the position exhibitors hold in a balanced event ecosystem. Treat them as strategic partners who provide thought leadership, content and expertise to your audience. That point of view, coupled with the blank canvas that currently exists across the digital events landscape, will produce game-changing experiences that far exceed what's being delivered today.

As exhibitor advocates, Tradeshow Logic approached this project as a way to collect important commentary to help associations and show organizers service and support their supplier and sponsor communities as live events re-emerge and online experiences evolve.

This survey, the third in a series, focuses on exhibitor and sponsor needs and perspectives. It presents current challenges around hybrid/digital event experiences and explains expectations of the association and show producer partners as 2021 progresses. It identifies elements that should be at the forefront as organizers seek to create successful engagement experiences in a post-pandemic world.

Over a 2-week period in the first quarter of 2021, Tradeshow Logic surveyed over 12,000 individuals at companies who exhibit at and sponsor events across diverse industries. The survey was completed by respondents from 21 shows, including heavy participation from the manufacturing and medical sectors.

Although the responses were gathered in the context of hybrid events, the answers clearly spoke to the larger premise of digital buyer and seller engagement and the opportunity that exists to improve this intrinsic event component.



Respondents said...

“Virtual experiences are meaningless to exhibitors if we don't have the ability to communicate with attendees in a substantive way. If the communication settings aren't improved, there's no sense in exhibiting.”

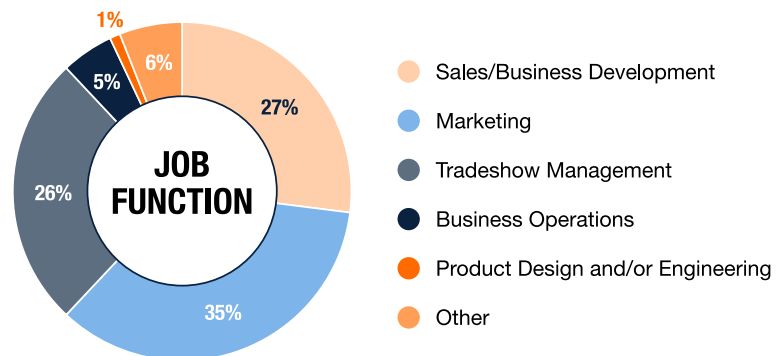
“It would be nice to have a technical contact that would help set up the digital exhibit space using best practices.”

“Make an effort to connect us to our audience. Have a team on hand to make those first contacts or introductions. A pre-show survey showing who is attending and their purchase readiness for specific projects would be helpful.”

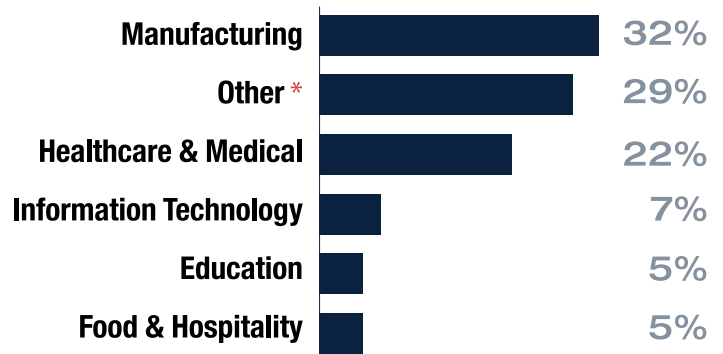
THE NEW FRONTIER

- i** Digital is here to stay – with plenty of opportunity for improvement.
- i** Focus on your powerful exhibitor community whose needs are evolving.
- i** Collect more data and use it to help drive intelligent buyer-seller engagement.
- i** Think of your event as a strategic marketing experience, not just a traditional tradeshow.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS



INDUSTRY



* Includes agriculture/landscape, business, financial & legal, law enforcement, natural resources/environmental, pharmaceutical, safety and transportation.



An Experience Boom Driven By Pent Up Demand

Exhibitors continue to rely on associations and show organizers to deliver audience and to facilitate intelligent experiences that connect buyers and sellers, but simply replicating an in-person tradeshow floor inside a virtual event platform isn't satisfying anyone.

It's time for a new perspective. Start thinking of tradeshows as strategic marketing tools that intelligently connect buyers and sellers. Worry less about labeling the experience as "virtual" or "hybrid" and concentrate more on introducing unique experiences that drill down to deliver productive and profitable solutions that help exhibitors justify the expense and time required to participate.



The Barriers Are Gone – Move Forward Now

The table is set for brave new initiatives that push the boundaries and break the mold of “what’s always been done.” Rules are changing; the status quo is being challenged. Now is the time to strengthen and solidify the value of your event across your constituent groups.

2020 solidified the need for a digital event experience...but this component has to be bigger than just two days a year that occurs simultaneously with your live event. A successful digital event strategy must supplement the in-person engagement, the content opportunities and the networking outcomes. Show organizers must work to marry content dissemination with monetization.



Respondents said...

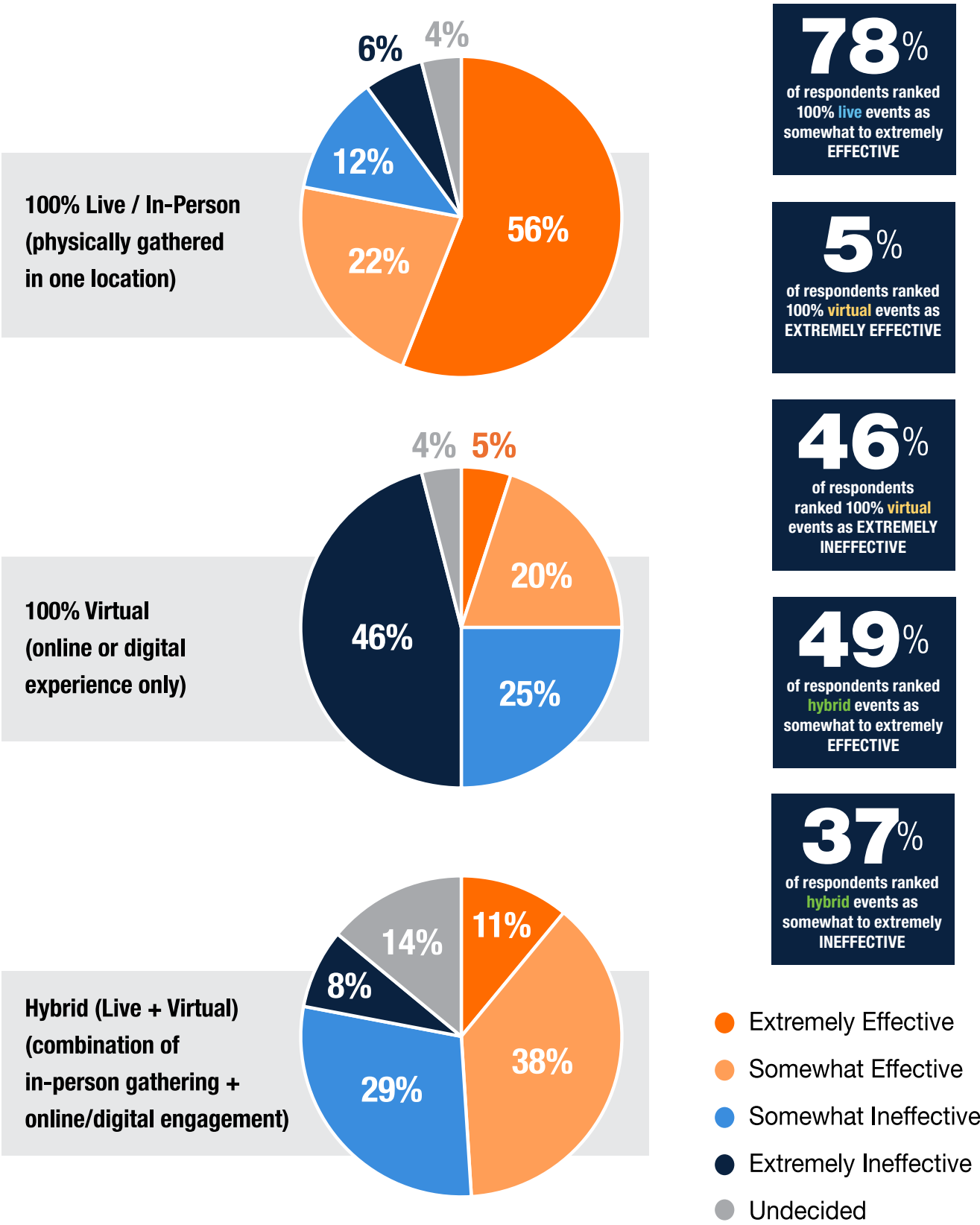
“Speaking opportunities are now the key objective and spending item on the list.”

“In 2020, we participated in many events staged as substitutes for our canceled in-person events. We are not seeking to 'exhibit' virtually at any events in 2021.”

What Will Continue to Be the Most Challenging Aspects of Digital Events?

- ▶ Having enough resources to effectively maintain and manage the digital and in-person components at the same time.
- ▶ Keeping attendees engaged.
- ▶ Effectively sharing product demos.
- ▶ Getting good data from show organizers about attendees – pre- & post-show.
- ▶ The cost to participate.
- ▶ Building lasting partner relationships and brand loyalty.
- ▶ Logistics and customer knowledge of the digital system.

How effective will each event model be in 2021 in terms of helping exhibitors achieve their sales and marketing objectives?



88%

of respondents said their organization was considering alternative channels outside of industry tradeshows to generate leads and achieve sales objectives.

Exhibitors' Top Alternative Marketing Tactics

- ▶ Enhanced social media strategy
- ▶ Digital ad retargeting
- ▶ Increased advertising in industry publications
- ▶ SEO, Google Ads & paid social media
- ▶ Hosting & participating in webinars
- ▶ Targeted email campaigns
- ▶ Video marketing
- ▶ Hired third party to help generate leads
- ▶ Small group events & virtual meetups
- ▶ Partnering with associations to access members via newsletters, banner ads and eblasts



Communicate Measured Value

You must evaluate, improve and communicate the experience and the outcomes to your exhibitor community so they continue to rely on your tradeshow as the #1 resource for capturing and growing their customer base.



Beware – Alternatives Exist

The widespread adoption of technology due to COVID-19 has allowed exhibitors and sponsors access to broad audiences (on 100% their terms) with few barriers and relatively low costs. In order to strengthen your relationship, ask your exhibitors what they're doing digitally outside of your event and look for ways to support their new digital initiatives.

Can you create and monetize an online resource that aggregates all the self-directed exhibitor and sponsor content and promotes it to your constituents? Can you provide help with list curation? Can you partner on social media? Can you use your exhibitors as an incubator for thought leadership at your live event? The possibilities are endless – but the need to redefine value and re-evaluate cost is imminent.



Respondents said...

"We've been hosting our own webinars in 2020. [They're providing] lower cost, higher engagement and better opportunity for follow up. Hosting our own online events via Zoom may replace some of our tradeshows with lower ROI."

"Most of us did as well if not better without going to shows in 2020. We have to consider the cost in terms of business lost in the office."

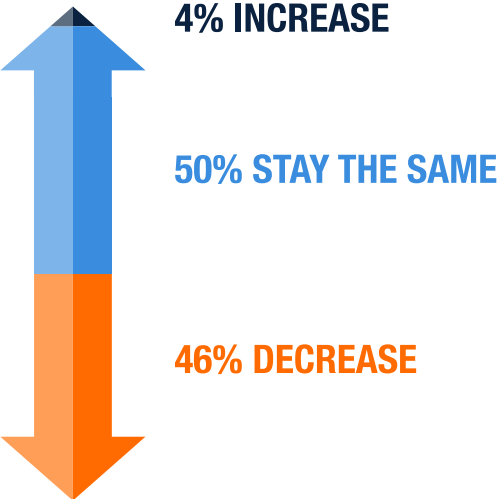
"Our biggest adjustment has been to find ways to engage attendees directly ourselves. We have done this by increasing our email campaigns and offering educational opportunities such as a webinar free of charge, and provided access to free content on our website."



96% of exhibitors indicated their marketing budgets are decreasing or staying the same in 2021 despite the fact that they'll have to support both in-person and digital versions of many events.

The needs and financial obligations of exhibitors and sponsors must be considered equally with those of attendees in order to prevent companies from reducing booth space or shrinking sponsorship investments.

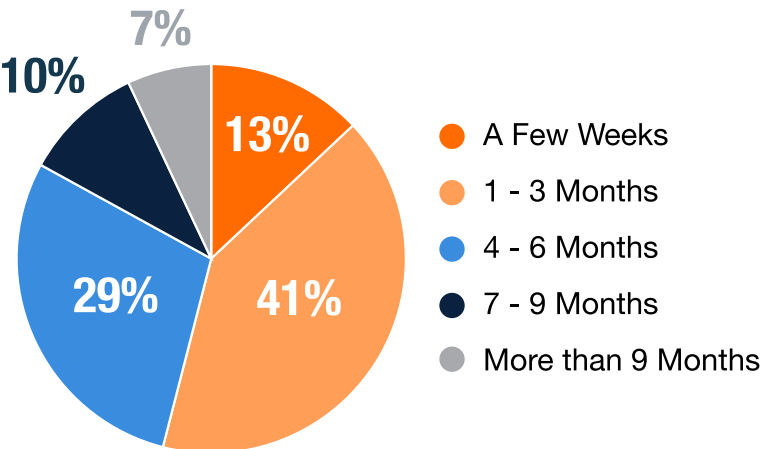
In order to accommodate booths for both an in-person exhibit hall and an online engagement experience, exhibitors expect their 2021 marketing budgets to:



52%

of respondents felt associations and show organizers were NOT adequately considering exhibitor needs as they planned events for 2021.

How long do you expect it will take your organization to properly prepare to exhibit at a hybrid event?



Respondents said...

"The cost of going to shows has risen beyond the break even mark yet show costs keep increasing."

"I believe a hybrid event will consume more money and time which will strain our already stretched events budget. We will need to increase resources or reduce the quantity of events in the future. I expect our company to reduce quantity and focus on quality of the hybrid experience."



Amplify the Value of the Exhibit Hall

Regardless of the event format, do a deep dive with your exhibitors to discover specific innovations, product launches, cutting edge research or key industry experts being profiled in their booths. Stop limiting the benefits of an exhibit hall to free coffee and online giveaways and start showcasing it as a place of unprecedented opportunity to discover better applications, new technologies and real-world expertise. Leverage this content to attract attendees. Use it to define the event's unique value proposition and its "reason for being" in the marketplace.



Two Experiences = Two Markets

If you have an advisory committee for your organization's live event, consider organizing a completely separate group for your digital experience. Find constituents who engage 100% virtually and ask for their insight. It's important to acknowledge the difference between these meeting formats and to evaluate improvements for each one independently.

Pay attention to the new audience you gain via the virtual format. How can you nurture and grow this group of new guests? What can you learn about them to help your exhibitor community support these new prospects?

4 Ways to Improve Engagement & Increase Exhibitor Value



Thought Leadership Opportunities

Adjust education schedules so exhibitors can share their message and expertise with a captive audience at the beginning or end of an educational session. Use this opportunity to educate attendees about solutions available to them in the exhibit hall.



Post-Show Communication Strategy

Continue to market recorded content and exhibitor access after the event concludes. A strong post-show marketing strategy will extend the opportunity to deliver prospective customers to exhibitors and sponsors.



Marketing Services

Provide your exhibitors with turnkey marketing services (like ad retargeting, social media management, video storytelling, digital invitations) to promote their participation in your event. Empower them to spread the word to the widest audience possible.



Curated Exhibit Hall

Collect content about what's being offered by exhibitors on the show floor. Organize and share this information with attendees based on their identified needs or categories of interest. Make it easy for both parties to connect.



Data-Driven Expectations

Embrace the way consumers interact with data in other areas of their lives and infuse those behaviors into your in-person and digital events.

Collect as much information as possible about attendees and exhibitors. Then use that intelligence to build segmented, personalized, effective opportunities for solving problems, fostering connections and making introductions that lead to new business. Create an experience that can't be replicated anywhere else and provide the metrics and reporting to back it up.



Respondents said...

"Give us more than just the number of people that registered for a virtual event. Tell us how many actually logged in, how long they stayed logged in, what sessions they attended, what content they consumed, which virtual chat rooms they joined, etc."

"Live event measurement has got to get better and it has to look beyond the number of badges scanned. We need to measure return on objective. We need better ways to measure traffic through our booth such as heat mapping devices at a reasonable cost and consolidated reports showing media coverage generated by the show to help exhibitors quantify their individual impact by looking at share of voice."

"Identify active buyers. Provide complete data on the attendees that interact with my brand. Provide insights on where attendees spent the most time."



Digital Tools Come With Expectations

What happened in 2020 with virtual events was a stop-gap measure that ultimately fell short of satisfying the industry. However, it opened the door for a revolution of digital engagement activities that support and enhance an association's role in helping businesses achieve sales and marketing objectives.

For many exhibitors and sponsors, their inability to engage with attendees in an online platform in 2020 rendered them unaware of potential new prospects that many digital events attracted.

Who were these new people? What kinds of organizations did they represent? What roles did they play within these organizations? Why did they attend for the first time in 2020? Are they planning to return again in 2021? How would they like to engage in the future?

It is now imperative to capture and maintain as much information as possible about attendee and exhibitor audiences. Expand registration questions outside of basic demographics to include relevant data that can be useful for matchmaking and developing personalized experiences. Look to online retailers and entertainment

mavens like Amazon and Netflix for inspiration and examples.

Now more than ever, exhibitors expect associations and show organizers to actively connect buyers and sellers through data-driven tools and solutions. Commit to providing methods for showcasing exhibitors and actively disseminating personalized information that helps each attendee find the solutions or products he/she needs most.



Are You Prepared For What's Ahead?

The events industry is standing on the brink of unprecedented opportunity. New, creative, innovative solutions do exist – you just have to dig a little deeper to find them. Tradeshow Logic's long-standing position as an exhibitor advocate gives us a unique perspective to build a bridge to the other side, wherever that may lead.



Tradeshow Logic helps associations and show organizers:

- *Create more buyer-seller connections*
- *Increase marketing & engagement*
- *Reduce the cost of participation*
- *Elevate the experience for everyone involved*

Why do anything? Failure to redefine value for your exhibitors and sponsors could result in your event losing status as an industry leader, an erosion of key relationships, lower revenues and communities becoming vulnerable to predatory media companies and competitors.

Why now? Barriers have come down and sweeping industry change is inevitable. Now is the time to seize the opportunities and the innovation created by the disruption in 2020.

Why Tradeshow Logic? At Tradeshow Logic we believe exhibitors are the heart of the industry. Our team consists of diverse industry experts including show producers, association managers, general contractors and convention center executives who know the hurdles exhibitors face and understand how to overcome them. We rely on our proven data-driven process to identify pain points and then build solutions that fit each specific need. Then we stand with you as your partner to execute against them all.

We can help slingshot your events into 2021 and beyond.



Tradeshow Logic is dedicated to giving our clients the resources and support to make bold decisions that drive transformative and sustainable change. We use data analytics and stakeholder insights to create and implement smart event solutions that grow revenue, reduce cost, and elevate the customer experience.

From beginning to end, we'll help you with:

- Total Event Management
- Customer Insights & Data Analytics
- Complete Event Strategy
- Audience Acquisition & Marketing Strategy
- Exhibit Sales & Sponsorship
- Vendor Strategy
- Event Operations & Logistics
- Attendee & Exhibitor Customer Care



How can we help? Let's get started!

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